

Passing Grades

The steps used to evaluate employee skills deserve some regular assessments of their own

Formal assessments begin when most people are barely old enough to tie their own shoes, and when the results of a report card are limited to grades for identifying shapes, mastering the alphabet or playing well with others.

But the analyses remain an important part of the learning process in the years that follow.

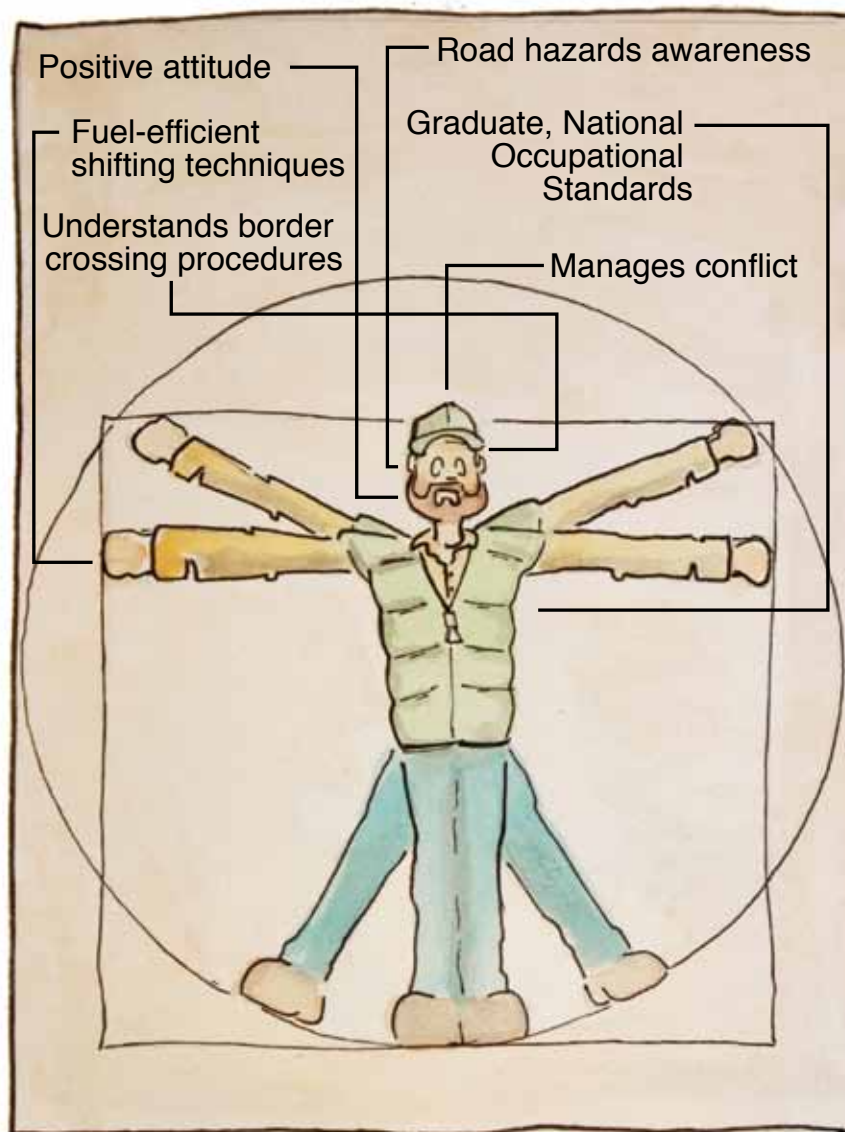
Of course, the assessment of a fleet employee is more than a matter of handing out a gold star or posting some artwork on a bulletin board. The results will play a key role in hiring decisions, identify training needs and determine whether someone has the skills to safely perform a specific job. Each one of those steps will play a role in retaining customers and avoiding costly collisions alike.

They are factors that make a refined assessment

process particularly important, according to a professional development program for assessors, developed by the Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council (CTHRC).

The process should always begin with something as fundamental as an understanding of the skills that are being measured, establishing how each of them will contribute to a fleet's specific goals. The clearly defined questions that emerge will ensure everyone is measured in an equal way.

The measurements also need to be as specific as possible. For example, a checklist that asks an assessor whether someone is a "good driver" is open for interpretation. Does that mean they didn't hit anything? Does it refer to a positive attitude? In contrast, a question which asks whether a driver demonstrates a set of defined defensive driving skills will ensure



a clear answer that can be matched against the desired outcomes.

Different skills will need to be assessed in unique ways as well. While a ride-along might be a perfect tool for measuring a driver's ability to back into a tight loading dock, a role playing exercise can offer a better option when trying to understand how the individual would deal with an irate customer.

The assessment itself should also reflect the background of the person whose skills are being measured. An assessor can establish if a driver is ready for an evaluation by first reviewing the licensing and training certificates. The deeper review of a driver file will identify issues that require a little more scrutiny.

Still, the expectations need to be realistic. A brand new driver may struggle with fuel-efficient shifting techniques that should be second nature to a counterpart who has logged hundreds of thousands of kilometers on the road.

The best assessments strike a balance between presenting a challenge and coaxing someone to stretch the abilities that need to be demonstrated on the job. It would hardly be fair to assess a driver on a skill that they would never require. Just as an urban driver will likely have little need to be tested on border crossing procedures, those who haul van trailers may not need to demonstrate the load securement measures that fasten steel coils on a flatdeck trailer.

Drivers will also need access to the tools that a proper assessment will require. A review of load securement procedures, for example, will need to be supported by equipment such as chains, blocks and other safety devices that are related to the task.

Attitudes will make their own difference to the outcome.

Drivers will perform more effectively when dealing with a friendly, supportive and honest assessor. In contrast, their work will suffer if they are belittled or criticized throughout the process.

A clearly defined assessment process will play its own role in developing that positive mindset.

While this will help an assessor understand why the skills need to be measured in the first place, it will also help to ease the minds of those being assessed.

Any form of assessment can be a nerve-racking experience, leading to errors that are out of character. But with a clear understanding of a route that will be traveled, and the specific actions that need to be demonstrated, a driver will offer a better indication of the skills that they have acquired.

For more information on professional development programs for coaches, mentors and assessors, go to www.cthrc.com.

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